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## THE PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH TO PROPHECY

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The psychology of religion is no longer a new field of research. Within the last two decades, it has been pursued from various points of approach, and no one who has followed its development can question its contribution to the clearer understanding and deeper appreciation of religion in its relation to the whole mental life.

During these years both psychology and religion have been subjected to new scrutiny; a psychological method of dealing with religion has added zest in both fields of inquiry, and has produced interesting and stimulating results. These researches and their results have been of great practical value, especially in the province of child and adolescent religion.

But comparatively little has been done in the way of a scientific analysis and an attempted explanation of the special and higher forms of religious experience, as exhibited by the prophet or the mystic. The literature in this field is still scanty. Professor Ames<sup>1</sup> in his recent volume devotes a chapter to the psychology of religious genius. A. B. Davidson<sup>2</sup> has dealt specifically, though briefly, with some of the phases of this topic. George Adam Smith<sup>3</sup> in his commentaries on the prophets drops interesting hints of the possibilities in this line of research. Two more recent small volumes by Kaplan<sup>4</sup> and Joyce<sup>5</sup> show the tendency of the times. These books are in the nature of essays on the subject of prophetic psychology, rather than systematic and exhaustive treatments. Among the Germans even less has been done from the truly psychological point of approach. Giesebrecht<sup>6</sup> and Kurtz<sup>7</sup> have

<sup>1</sup> *The Psychology of Religious Experience.*

<sup>2</sup> *Old Testament Prophecy*, and articles on (1) "Prophecy and Prophets," (2) "Jeremiah" in *HBD*.

<sup>3</sup> *Expositor's Bible.*

<sup>5</sup> *The Inspiration of Prophecy.*

<sup>4</sup> *The Psychology of Prophecy.*

<sup>6</sup> *Berufsbegabung der Propheten.*

<sup>7</sup> *Psychologie der vorexilische Prophetie.*

written monographs on prophetic psychology, and Duhm<sup>1</sup> and Cornill<sup>2</sup> in their commentaries have shown something of what might be accomplished by a thorough working of this field.<sup>3</sup>

But it remains for this interesting, not to say tantalizing, subject to receive the attention it deserves and it will not be strange if the next wave of interest in both the Old Testament and the New centers along this line, for in many ways it furnishes a more engrossing and productive angle of approach to the literature than does the purely historical. Historical criticism has by no means completed its task, but it may be that it has now come to such a stage of maturity that it is willing to take to itself an ally that will help it to achieve more positive results. For such a position psychological analysis and explanation is a contender.

This paper is an attempt to present a method of approach to the religion of the prophet. The method purports to be psychological and to distinguish between those materials which may be entered and considered in a scientific evaluation of so elevated a type of religious experience, and those which may not. At our basis lies the historical method and we must heed well all its findings; but on this basis we make a new evaluation—the psychological—which is even more exacting in its demands for accuracy and balance of judgment.

It goes without saying that such a program as is here presented is not merely theoretical. It could not be put forth at all without considerable concrete study in the field of both psychology and prophecy. In testing out our method two ways of dealing with the prophetic materials are open. One way is to draw illustrations for any particular thesis in the process of development of the program from the whole range of prophetic literature. Naturally this is the easier, for it furnishes a much wider choice of concrete illustrations, and by their use the method can be rounded out much more satisfactorily in its practical application. The other and harder method of application is to take the whole life of a single prophet, so far as the sources furnish us the materials, and work it out in a more human and intelligible picture. In such a study lies the particular value of this program of prophetic experience, if it turns out to have

<sup>1</sup> *Commentaries on the Prophets.*

<sup>2</sup> *Commentary on Jeremiah.*

<sup>3</sup> Hölscher's *Profeten* (1914) appeared too late for use here.

a particular value. It is an ambitious program and is not content to give up the pursuit of so high a form of religion until scientific research has done its work and the laws of cause and effect in the religious realm have been applied. It is not necessarily an attempt to prove that all forms and degrees of religious genius can be analyzed and defined in terms of modern psychology, but rather a willingness to go as far as facts carry us and then to make proper and valid inferences on the basis of such facts. If there remain an unexplained residuum, we have the assured belief that psychology will not be discredited, just as we are led to believe that religion will not suffer if psychological science is able to give a reasonable explanation of some of the phenomena that formerly were considered too sacred to be scrutinized.

Two preliminary tasks arise for one who applies this or any similar program—tasks arising from the nature of the prophetic materials. The first pertains to the interpretation of the literary form in which the prophet gives expression to his experience. A casual perusal of the prophetic books will show that all the prophets were conscious of what they interpreted to be a divine compulsion; the most common form of the manifestation of this extra-human influence is visions and voices. The question raised here is not one as to the reality of the experience, but one as to whether the form in which it is found is literal or figurative. Manifestly, we cannot settle the question *a priori*, nor even by appeal to the facts in the case of one or two prophets. It is a question which must be raised afresh as we approach the record of each individual prophet. All that can be done here, then, is to indicate what would seem to be a scientific procedure in addressing ourselves to the problem.

The problem, then, is: Are vision and voice a convenient literary form inherited from the past or developed for the exigency by means of which to give vivid, outward expression to the inner experience, or are they a genuine and real part of the experience? Unless we recognize this problem, all sorts of complications may arise in attempting a reasonable exegesis. From this point of view, each seer presents his own problem. They cannot all be treated according to one criterion. Amos, Isaiah, and Ezekiel present, each his own peculiarity of vision form, and in each case a faithful effort

must be made to distinguish between that part which is mere figure or framework, consciously so used, and that which for the prophet was an integral and real part of his experience. This will require the most subtle literary and psychological criteria, but the attempt is worth making if we are to get at the core of the matter.

The second preliminary consideration, viz., the question of the sources, may be passed with a word. We have fallen upon perilous times in matters of historical criticism, and in the *mêlée* none has suffered more than some of our most endeared Old Testament prophets. In the present status of criticism, it is impossible to be exact in the use of literary materials. The only safe plan to pursue is to take the minimum of authenticated sources as our basis of procedure, and even then we are not sure that some of these will not be discredited tomorrow. Yet there is some comfort in the fact that the psychological reconstruction suffers less in these uncertain days than the historical; for history has to do with exact facts and without them it cannot proceed far, while the psychological method gets its chief value in the study of the bold outlines of a life. This is not to say, however, that it is not closely conditioned by historical fact, at every step.

We undertake now a plan for the genetic study of the prophet's experience and distinguish four principal topics, as follows: (1) antecedents and inheritances; (2) environment; (3) temperament; (4) the prophetic experience.

#### I. THE PROPHET'S ANTECEDENTS AND INHERITANCES

In the light of biological and psychological science, it is becoming ever more certain that the roots of our lives, our beliefs and practices, are deeply imbedded in the past; that the average individual is what he is largely because of what he has lived through in racial history, however narrowly or widely those terms may be interpreted; and that even the most extraordinary person is not wholly free from this enslavement to the past. There are ever fewer and fewer geniuses, in the sense that they transcend and defy explanation in terms that can be accounted for. Therefore, it will not be strange if we find some of the prophet's peculiarities in these inheritances. He may have passively accepted them and been

unconsciously guided by them, or, he may have analyzed their influence upon his times and reacted against them. A study of these antecedents will have to do with both the form and the content of the prophet's message. What, then, has the previous age contributed to the form of prophecy in its golden age? This will require a complete study of the earlier forms of prophecy in Israel, as well as of the form of prophetic messages among other and earlier peoples; in other words, a genetic study of the form of prophecy, for rudiments of form are likely to persist even after the content has completely changed. It is well to note that here we are dealing with a different question from the one raised in the preliminary study. There we asked: Was the form in which the prophet couched his message a true facsimile of that message as it came to him or was he consciously using literary form as the vehicle of his thought? Here we ask the still more ultimate question: What influence had the form of earlier prophecy on the form in which the prophet felt bound to receive his message in order that it might be authentic? Did his inheritance along this line dictate to him the psychological condition in which his mind must be placed, in order that he might be receptive to the divine message, or did he strike out rather boldly and independently, and largely disregard the form dictated by tradition; in short, was he able to distinguish between form and essence; e.g., did trance and ecstasy so persist in the time of Amos and Isaiah that they were sought by these men as genuine prophetic experiences, as forms that were considered a necessary and integral part of the message; or, on the other hand, has the prophet here supervened his inheritance, and developed a new conception of prophecy in which the essential element is not, in any degree, linked to form, but consists entirely in its ethical and religious content, regardless of the way in which it may have been intuited; or, in the third place, does he fall somewhere between these two extremes, showing considerable progress toward an ethical religion inwardly conditioned, but not being able entirely to free himself from inherited and conventional forms?

Then what have inherited ideas had to do with conditioning the prophet's mind for his work, either by hindering or by helping? Here we must take into survey the religious conceptions of the

pre-prophetic age and scrutinize them as carefully as possible. It is not difficult to see that there was great progress in the purification and clarification of religious ideas in the two centuries preceding the great prophets, and, although Amos comes upon us suddenly and seemingly without proper introduction, with his independent social and ethical ideas, yet we may find, on closer analysis, that in him and his successors many ideas that were already in process of crystallization have come out into the clear light, fostered by their vigor and insight, and have entered more or less fully into the currents of their common thoughts. This fact could no doubt be much more completely shown than is commonly thought, if our authentic sources for this period were not so few. It is reasonable to believe that there were currents of ethical thought preceding Amos, of which we have scarcely any direct hint. It may be possible to trace these out more clearly than has yet been done, even with the meager sources at our disposal. Such a study would scarcely have warrant were it not for the fact that we have a growing appreciation of the debt each generation owes to its predecessors. Such a study, if in any degree successful, will not detract one whit from the greatness of these great men. They will still retain a sufficient meed of praise; they stand out on the basis of what they were and what they did, but it will help us to understand them better and thus to appreciate them the more. An examination of these inherited views would include such topics as the pre-prophetic or (in the case of later prophets) the earlier prophetic views of God; the cultus; the ethical element in religion in this period; the prophet and his work, his relation to politics and government, his attitude toward the innovations of advancing civilization, etc.

## II. THE PROPHET'S ENVIRONMENT

Here, at the outset, it is necessary to define terms, so as to make a clear distinction between the matter treated in the foregoing topic and that which is to be included here. In the above section, we attempt to deal with influences which persist from a former age. Here, we desire to classify those influences which are new, which take origin in the prophet's own time, owing to political and social

changes and exigencies. Here again it is not incumbent upon us to find the prophet entirely a child of his own times, else he would not be worthy of special study; but when we do study the conditions with which he was surrounded and find him in part influenced by them, in part withstanding them, we understand him the better for so doing. And this juxtaposition of his own views to those current among his people may be one of the secrets of the development of his character. If great men are the product of great times, then the inference is clear, if we would learn the secret of the men themselves. Was the prophet a nationalist, and, if so, was he one for the same reason that his fellow-Israelites were, or did his insight into conditions drive him to a new interpretation of the political significance of his nation? Was it the political influence or was it the social that bulked largest in the making of Amos and the content of his scathing sermons? What were the peculiar circumstances, within and without, that gave Hosea his hot, tender message of divine love? What do the messages of Isaiah and Jeremiah owe to the political and religious background of their day? Do their differing environments throw any light upon the fact that Micah prophesied with no uncertain tone the fall of Jerusalem, while Isaiah repeatedly held to the inviolability of the Holy City, even though he was convinced that the surrounding country districts would be devastated? In a word, to what extent do the confines of time and place and circumstance limit the horizon of the seer and prescribe the materials which shall furnish content and coloring for his message? In a study of this character, not only do we learn what contribution an age makes to a man's thinking and doing, but, what is more important, we get here, in the clash between ideals and actual conditions which must be faced, the breeding-ground of persistence, vigor, character, and message, by means of which the man makes his contribution to his age and all subsequent ages. The environment of home, church, school, society, and country are not a negligible factor in any life, however extraordinary or peculiar.

### III. THE PROPHET'S TEMPERAMENT

Temperament is rather an elusive term when its analysis is attempted, but unless we can deal with it in more or less satisfactory



fashion, some secret of prophetic greatness may escape us; understanding it, we may see clearly some of the factors that have hitherto been indistinct. First of all there is a temperament of youth and of rising manhood, becoming conscious of itself, as distinguished from that of the mature man who has settled down to face the hard facts of life. Did the prophets receive their calls in young manhood just as they were emerging from the enchanted land of adolescence? If so, much light is thrown upon their experience by modern studies in the later adolescent period. Does it make any difference whether Isaiah was twenty or forty years of age when he saw the Holy One, high and lifted up, his train filling the temple? Can age have anything to do with the peculiar sternness and severity of Amos' messages?

While temperament is admitted to be largely hereditary—possibly because we know so little about it—yet it may be much more a product of training, and especially of very early impressions, than we are wont to believe. While evidence on this point is almost entirely lacking in the case of the prophets, yet we must not neglect any of it that lies at hand, if it will help to explain peculiarities of individuals. City-breeding gives a certain bent to one's conceptions; pastoral life, another, and agricultural pursuits, yet another. Acquaintance with the best science of an age gives a type of thinking very different from that found among those who think naïvely.

But more important than these is that peculiar, inborn, mental composition which distinguishes individuals and which seems so deep rooted as to defy all attempts to classify it under a norm or type. Though all external stimuli may seem to be similar if not identical, mental reactions are found to be very different from each other in different individuals. You cannot run the thinking of mentally active people into the same mold, but under the most favorable conditions, it is by no means a rarity to get the most diverse types of mental process and product. What is the explanation? One man is a rationalist; another is highly emotional. Either may become a mystic and have inexplicable experiences, but they arrive at them by very different routes. One man is active and aggressive in temperament; another is passive and retiring. Infilled with a divine passion, one of these men experiences the over-

powering influence of a great Spirit or Personality, in whose hands he is passive and helpless; the other is conscious of his own heightened power of activity, under the inspiration of the same Spirit. They may be equally vigorous and fiery in carrying out the mission intrusted to them. Will these and other observations by modern psychology, when applied to the prophet, help us the better to understand the man and his message?

#### IV. THE PROPHET'S EXPERIENCE

We come now to the crux of the whole matter, an attempt to explain, or at least to interpret, that peculiar experience which makes a prophet a prophet, which distinguishes him from any other class of religionist and lifts him to a table-land of insight and outlook which intensifies his religious energy many fold and charges his whole life and being with a new purpose and opens up larger capacities. If we cannot, to some extent, enter into this holy of holies, all our preliminary drawings-nigh will be largely of no avail, for the only excuse one may give for undertaking this overweening task of psychological analysis is that he may get near to the heart of the experience of men who had a peculiar consciousness of the immediate presence of God in their lives, and a special sensitiveness to his revelation, both of himself and of his message to them. We are not here concerned with mere description; we must go deeper; an effort must be made to interpret the experience and its meaning for our time, as well as for the prophet and his day. The most rigid and critical tests of modern research in the psychological field must be applied. If the prophet was self-deceived and a satisfactory explanation in subjective terms can be made of his experience, this does not, in the least, detract from what he was and what he accomplished, but it makes it practically impossible for his experience and his type of character to be duplicated in our more scientific age, at least among those who understand the viewpoint of psychology. But if we must conclude that there is more than the subjective, that his experience is the result of a divine personal energy working upon, and co-operating with, an intense human spirit, we get a religious state devoutly to be wished and sought by men of every time.

Professor Ames, in his chapter on "Psychology and Religious Genius," says:

[It has often been assumed that genius, including religious genius] designated an assumed irreducible and unanalyzable factor in human nature, a kind of given endowment which the science of psychology cannot legitimately adopt. It is a part of the scientific attitude to insist upon the application of analysis and interpretation to all factors and functions of the mental life. It is too much to expect that psychological explanations will not be undertaken simply because the phenomena involved are complex or obscure, or because some people insist that they are wholly inscrutable. The results of the investigation may be negative or meager or only partially sustained, but no phenomena of human experience can lay claim to immunity from at least the attempt to understand them. Therefore any statement of genius which assumes it to involve factors radically different from those of ordinary experience is vitiated at the outset by that assumption.

Professor Leuba goes even farther and gives the distinct impression that psychology has the legitimate right to preëempt to itself the entire field of religion and to declare that there is no phenomenon in this field that psychology cannot grapple with and explain.

Psychology, on its side, claims the right to submit every content of consciousness to scientific study, whether it be dubbed "inner," "spiritual," or otherwise; moreover, it has begun to make good that claim.<sup>1</sup> . . . Religious experience ("inner experience") belongs entirely to psychology—"entirely" being used in the same sense as when it is claimed that the non-religious portions of conscious life belong entirely to science.<sup>2</sup> . . . I trust that it has become clear that the hope to lift a theology based on inner experience out of the sphere of science is preposterous; since whatever appears in consciousness is material for psychology. Religious knowledge may be said to be immediate and independent of science only in the sense in which this can be stated of any experience. Any bit of conscious life is in itself, as a fact of consciousness, unassailable. But a theology that should remain within a domain inaccessible to science would be limited to a mere description of man's religious consciousness and would be deprived of the right to any opinion on the objective reality of its objects and on the universal validity of its propositions. . . . If super-human factors are at work within human experience, there are no ways of discovering them except the ways of science.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, Professor Pratt is much less sanguine as to the ability of psychology to solve all problems in the province of religion:

<sup>1</sup> Leuba, *A Psychological Study of Religion*, p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.

Equally misleading does it seem to me to suppose, as some leading "functional" psychologists seem to do, that the psychology of religion can ever so develop as to be in any sense a substitute for philosophy or theology. In the opinion of this school, ethics, aesthetics, logic, epistemology, and metaphysics are ultimately nothing but functional psychology.<sup>1</sup> . . . The psychology of religion must . . . content itself with a description of human experience, while recognizing that there may well be spheres of reality to which these experiences refer and with which they are possibly connected, yet which cannot be investigated by science.<sup>2</sup>

These quotations from leading scholars in this field show that the psychology of religion is yet in process of finding itself and that there is no consensus of opinion even among these experts themselves as to its proper province. The theory of Professor Leuba which allows no objective validity to the content of "value judgments" is not likely to be very generally accepted and will need further elucidation and buttressing. On the other hand, Professor Pratt seems rather too modest in his claims for the new science. However, for his side of the case it may reasonably be said that the psychology of religion is scarcely likely to be so successful in revealing and explaining the content and meaning of our religious selves that men will cease to philosophize and theologize; i.e., to transcend the boundaries of pure scientific observation and induction and to move out into the realm of speculation and "faith." The criterion set forth in Professor Ames's statement of the case seems sound, and there is little danger that a thoroughgoing psychology will go too far. If we persist in creating for ourselves, or if there is already created for us, an extra-scientific world, a "faith" realm, then it is clear that psychology can have no dealings with it, either to prove or to disprove its existence. Philosophical assumptions are not material for psychological analysis; while psychology may satisfy itself in the explanation of religious genius, without the assumption of an extra-human, divine element, and while in some cases its analysis may be true to the facts, yet it can never prove that it has the truth in all cases, nor yet can it even prove in what specific cases it has the whole truth in the matter. So long as we admit a realm, the objective reality of which is not subject to psychological scrutiny, religion

<sup>1</sup> Pratt, article "Psychology of Religion," in *Journal of Religious Psychology*, V, 391.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 393.

will present phenomena which do not lie within the realm of scientific proof, and whether we assume divine afflatus, or whether we rule it out, *either* assumption is a postulate of the mind and not a proved fact. Furthermore, the term "ordinary experience," used by Professor Ames in the last sentence of his quotation, does not claim that some degree of a personal knowledge of God is not a part of normal religious experience; thus we may not assume at the outset that the genius is a man of peculiar endowments, different in kind rather than in degree from those of his fellows. But if, in the course of our investigations and analyses of any specific character, we find elements which cannot be separated out and classified according to the accepted norms, if there is found the unanalyzable residuum, it is the part of the scientific attitude to recognize it, even if we must hold judgment temporarily in suspense, or plead the cause of a yet undeveloped science.

The theory that greatness is constituted not so much of entirely new and strange elements as of a proper and symmetrical blending of the common qualities and graces unmistakably has some startling illustrations in its favor. If it be true, then the Hebrew prophet may not be such a psychological enigma as a more superficial view would indicate.

As has already been pointed out, it is safe to assume that in many ways the prophet was a child of his times. Mentally, his stock of ideas is very largely that in common circulation. The different currents of ideas may combine in varying proportions. In his case, the ideas of the prophetic party, which is essentially, though not nominally, the religious party, have the predominance, while the formalistic side of religion represented by the cultus does not appeal to him. Furthermore, the prophet is not an apathetic thinker; his mental life is enkindled and intense. He has a peculiar ability to rearrange ideas, so that new truths present themselves clearly. The prophet is not a traditionalist; he does not live in the past; on the other hand, he is willing to take from the past beliefs which are conserving elements in the present religious and social crisis. Again, he was no mere dreamer of dreams who looked sanguinely for the "far-off divine event" which would usher in a glorious age. He lived in and for his own day; and he was the greatest man of his

day, simply because his mental vision took in the whole range of facts, however disquieting some of them might be. He was not a false optimist nor was he a false pessimist, but he saw the truth as it was, not simply as a closed revelation, but also as based on facts interpreted in harmony with universal law.

This mental alertness made the prophet a student of his times. The question whether or not he was an educated man in any technical or academic sense is not of so great importance. He was awake and new truth was constantly coming to him; his education was never declared "finished." Thus it was easy for new revelations to be received by him; he could neither resist nor reject them. Mental alertness and breadth, ethical depth, and religious exaltation which in its purest form expresses itself in a consciousness of fellowship with God form together an equilateral triangle, or better, a closed circle of experience. They are all of a piece; they produce the symmetrical person. It may be quite impossible to say in which of these three compartments of the individual's mental life the enkindling begins, or what may have been the specific cause which served to fan the smoldering spirit into flame, but if these three elements are combined in proper proportions, the one reacts upon the others until in turn all three are raised to a white heat, and then "who can but prophesy"?

It may be well to note that for the prophet there seemed to be no well-defined differentiation of national, social, and religious consciousness from each other, and we may even go farther and say that, at times at least, he was scarcely able to detect a personal consciousness as distinct from these three. The age of clear individualism was yet in the future and the prophet was not, consciously at least, a psychologist. So far as he analyzed his mental states at all, he was interested largely in their religious meaning. But, if the foregoing analysis contains any truth, it throws light upon the attitude of the prophet; it explains why he was so zealous in matters of politics and government; it opens up a reason for his proclivities toward social reform; it helps to explain his ardent love for his people, even in their sin and wickedness. They were an undifferentiated part of himself and of his God. Furthermore, this analysis may go far in explaining his religious

nature, for, if he was so intimately associated with his people—the nation—on one hand, and his God on the other, so that his own consciousness was both a social- and a God-consciousness, he could have been but a mouthpiece of God to the nation, feeling himself a passive agent in God's hand, even when he had been most active, mentally and morally, in preparing himself for his mission. As his social message grew upon him, it assumed proportions which made it appeal to him as superhuman and hence as divinely originated. This idea as a principle of interpretation would, of course, require to be worked out in detail in accordance with ascertainable facts, in the case of each separate prophet.

One set of interpreters of the psychology of the prophet makes the original element in his experience to be a "premonition"<sup>1</sup> that the nation is to be destroyed. His ideas follow this order: first, he has a premonition of this event; then, he looks about for that which is to be the cause of destruction, and finds it in the sin of the nation; then, more gradually he is led to predict the agent of the destruction.

But whence the premonition? It must be manufactured out of thin air. What data in the mind of the prophet serve to give this premonition ballast and content? Would it not be much more natural, as well as scientific, to suppose that the prophet received his impetus either from a study of the social and political conditions, or from so real and compelling a fact as a new and higher conception of the nature of God, based on study and observation—i.e., real mental activity—and that then, as a natural consequence of his observations, he concluded that the downfall of the nation, if the nation persisted in its present way, was but a matter of time?

Finally an attempt must be made to interpret not only the larger and more general experience of the prophet, but also that more specific experience which may be called religious, through which he became conscious of his call from God and his mission to the people. After a careful study of the narrative in order to discover and set aside any literary device that may have been used to convey the fact of his experience to his hearers or readers, we have next to determine if possible whether he is relating a single outstanding experience which was epoch-making in his career, or

<sup>1</sup> Kaplan, *The Psychology of Religion*.

whether these experiences came to him periodically, due to excessive mental strain and possibly some temperamental abnormality, or whether his religious messages came to him intuitively, in the more or less even tenor of his way and without special excitation or ecstasy. Psychologically all these are possible modes or grades of inspiration. To critical thinking, they are of varying value; so are they also to naïve thinking, but in inverse ratio. We are prone to think that in just the proportion in which ecstatic and trance states were absent or suppressed was the prophet's experience valid and his utterance valuable; hence we have a tendency in the case of the greater prophets to reduce this element to the minimum; but this somewhat dogmatic view may err in the wrong direction. It is too easy to assume that certain types of experience are authentic and therefore that opposite types must be weak, if not even vicious. By their fruits must they be known. If one man gets his vision of truth mystically, it is not for the scientifically minded to declare his experience invalid, in the nature of things, and vice versa. But it would not be surprising if we found that, as the ethical element in the prophet's message comes to the fore, the more or less irrational and subnormal forms of inspiration recede, for rational and ethical truth are discerned by the more sober and logical mental processes.

Thus it is not difficult to see that in the pre-prophetic period, the ecstatic and trance states were considered quite a requisite preparation for, and hence a necessary and essential part of, the prophet's experience. In the period of the greater prophets, however, this ecstatic possession, as a state, was at the minimum, and a conscious intuition of truth, with little or no excessive excitation, took its place. Of this even Davidson is quite certain, for he uses as the closest analogy to the prophetic experience "the condition of the religious mind in earnest devotion, or rapt spiritual communion with God."<sup>1</sup> If we could reduce the prophetic experiences thus to one type, it would greatly simplify our problem, but when one reads the prophets it is quite reasonable to believe that these abnormal states of ecstasy, trance, vision, and audition did, to some extent, persist and insinuate themselves into prophetic times. Whether they did or not, and, if so, to what extent they did is the real

<sup>1</sup> Davidson, *HBD*, IV, 115, article on "Prophecy and Prophets."



problem, for modern psychology undertakes to explain all these states as self-induced, and not necessarily due to a supernatural cause. In fact, there is a growing certainty that the supernatural does not work in such capricious ways; but again, we must remember that the prophet is not a modern, in spite of all his points of superiority, and that even we moderns may not have the whole truth as yet. The point is that we must not discredit the prophet, if it can be reasonably shown that he did perceive truth while in these so-called abnormal states.

But for those who take a religious view of the world, there is no question as to the essence, the kernel of the prophet's experience and message. We believe that, not only at the heart of things, but in the van as well, "our God is marching on"; he makes progressive revelation of himself and of eternal truth, but he speaks clearly only to the sincere and inquiring mind. The prophet was passionate to know truth and righteousness. He lived in a time when new truth and new inspiration for right living were sorely needed. He went to what he believed to be the fountain-head of wisdom and goodness and he received them. That is probably as much as we can say. A quotation from Davidson applies just here:

It is vain to speculate how the Divine mind coalesces with the human, or to ask at what point the Divine begins to operate. Some have argued that the operation was dynamical; i.e., an intensification of the faculties of the mind, enabling it thus to reach higher truth. Others regard the Divine operation as of the nature of suggestion of truth to the mind. What is to be held, at all events, is that revelation was not the communication of general or abstract ideas to the intellect of the prophet. His whole religious mind was engaged. He entered into the fellowship of God, his mind occupied with all his own religious interests and all those of the people of God; and his mind thus operating, he reached the practical truth relevant to all occasions.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Davidson, *HBD*, IV, 116, article on "Prophecy and Prophets."